



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – 71st Anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea

**Ambassador Bleich's Remarks at the
Commemoration Ceremony for the
71st Anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea**

U.S Australian-American Memorial, Canberra

(As prepared – May 9, 2013)

The Hon. Andrew Leigh MP representing the Prime Minister;

The Hon. Angus Taylor MP representing the Leader of the Opposition;

Vice-Chief of Defense Force, Air Marshal Mark Binskin representing the Chief of the Australian Defense Force;

Honored friends and distinguished guests.

On behalf of the President and the People of the United States, it is a privilege to be with you here today to recall a battle that changed the course of history and to pay tribute to those who fought so bravely for our freedom.

I am particularly honored to see Gordon Johnson here representing his fellow veterans of this battle. Each year, the ranks of those veterans who served in the Coral Sea grow thinner. But because of the rare bonds they forged, and the legacy they've left, their spirit only grows stronger.

The Battle of the Coral Sea took place during the darkest days of World War II. Only a few months earlier a Japanese squadron had conducted a devastating surprise attack on U.S. naval forces in Pearl Harbor. That same squadron launched a similar attack on our joint forces in Darwin. Our navies were crippled and Japanese expansion seemed unstoppable. We needed a victory and the world needed hope. We hung those hopes on a group of young men; strangers, from different continents, thrown together by circumstances, to face battle in a vast ocean.

In those tense moments, manning their stations, awaiting a dangerous enemy, these men didn't have the luxury of casual friendships. They didn't care where the other guy went to school or what he did for a living or what kind of accent he had. In those circumstances, the only question that mattered was: "Is this someone I can trust with my life?"



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What mattered to them was character. And in the battle of the Coral Sea, that character was revealed.

Through that battle, Australians and Americans discovered in each other a rare character and an uncommon ethic. We don't fold under pressure. We don't leave our mates behind. We don't lose our faith that there are better days ahead.

“It'll be okay, buddy.”

“She'll be right, mate.”

That is our creed. And this ethic gave these young men the strength, in the darkest hours of World War II, to repel the Imperial Forces for the first time. Seventy one years ago at the Battle of the Coral Sea, a group of young Australians and Americans gave us hope and rewarded our faith.

Our victory was far from the end of the war. But the Coral Sea was a turning point. It proved that our enemies could be defeated. Perhaps more importantly, it showed the world that our resolve could not be broken. That when Americans and Australians stood together nothing could stop us.

It would be several years before the ANZUS treaty existed. But the alliance was written that day in May 1942 off the shores of Queensland, aboard the U.S.S. Yorktown, and in the Coral Sea. In the 71 years since, that alliance – that spirit -- has grown into one of the greatest partnerships between two peoples the world has ever seen.

Those who survived the battle and the war have shown us a better way. Their generation recognized better than any of us, the terrible costs of war, and its solution. To avoid future wars, we needed not only to defeat fascism, but to build something in its place. This generation rededicated itself to forging a spirit of friendship and cooperation between nations – to build bridges of trust and understanding across the largest and mightiest ocean on this earth.

And so on this day we pause and remember those men who made the ultimate sacrifice in May 1942 and we rededicate ourselves to measure up to their spirit and to their example.

In recognition of the significance of the Battle of the Coral Sea and in tribute to our alliance and the sacrifices that created it, President Obama prepared a special message to commemorate this 71st Anniversary. It is now my honor to read this message on behalf of the President and people of the United States.